



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H

METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Metropolitan Planning Commission

FROM: MPC Staff

DATE: January 29th, 2019

**SUBJECT: 703 Louisville Road – Gateway Project
WEDP-Fund I, LLC (c/o Bouhan Falligant LLP) – Petitioner
Aldermanic District 1 - Johnson
County Commission District 3 - Lockett
PIN 2-0030-05-001 and Unassigned Land
Total Area: 2.55 acres
File No. 18-006863-ZA and 18-006368-PLAN
Matt Lonnerstater, AICP – MPC Development Services Planner**

ISSUE:

At issue is a request to rezone a site comprising two parcels from P-RIP-D (Planned Medium-Density Residential) and I-H (Heavy Industrial) to P-RIP-D (Planned Medium-Density Residential). The property (two parcels to be recombined) comprises a 1.64-acre parcel owned by the applicant ("original parcel") and a 0.91-acre parcel adjacent to the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal which the applicant will purchase from the City of Savannah ("Surplus Parcel") pursuant to a Development Agreement (refer to **EXHIBIT A** for a map of the subject site and **EXHIBIT D** for the Development Agreement).

MPC staff recommends that the rezoning request be processed under the "*extraordinary and unusual conditions*" provision of Section 8-3031(D)(1)(a) of the Zoning Ordinance. This provision requires a general development plan to be submitted and reviewed in conjunction with the rezoning petition, with final action taken by the Mayor and Aldermen. The petitioner has submitted a General Development Plan for a proposed 255-unit multi-family residential development; the General Development Plan is attached (File No. 18-6368-PLAN).

BACKGROUND

The subject site is located in the Laurel Grove/Railroad Area neighborhood. The 2.55-acre site is an irregular-shaped parcel that is developed with a former freight terminal building constructed in 1929. Approximately 0.91-acres of the site adjacent to the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal is owned by the City of Savannah; the petitioner has entered into a Development Agreement (**EXHIBIT D**) with the City to purchase this parcel ("surplus parcel") and combine it with the original parcel to accommodate the proposed development. At this time, the surplus parcel does not have a PIN number assigned to it but does retain an I-H (Heavy Industrial) zoning designation.

The property is surrounded by four rights-of-way: Louisville Road to the north; the Savannah-

Ogeechee Canal to the east and south; and an off-ramp from U.S. Hwy 17 to the west. The Savannah Historic District is approximately 200 feet to the east at West Boundary Street.

On October 27th, 2016, City Council approved the request to rezone the original 1.64-acre parcel from I-H to P-RIP-D in conjunction with a general development plan for a 140-unit student housing development, which was never constructed (file no. 16-001421-ZA).

The petitioner is in the process of purchasing the 0.91-acre “surplus parcel” from the City of Savannah. The petitioner intends to combine the surplus parcel and original parcel into a single parcel and develop a 255-unit multi-family residential development. Because the surplus parcel retains an I-H zoning designation, and because the existing P-RIP-D zoning designation on the original parcel is tied to the previously-approved general development plan, the petitioner requests to rezone the surplus parcel to P-RIP-D and tie the entire site to a new general development plan under the provisions of Section 8-3031(D)(1)(a).

Proposed P-RIP-D District: The “P” in the P-RIP-D stands for the “Planned” overlay district. This district identifies site plan requirements that are in addition to the underlying base district (RIP-D). The RIP-D district is intended for the urban core – more specifically, the area located within the Savannah Historic District. The RIP-D district was established to allow a restaurant on Abercorn Street to serve beer and wine, provided that a number of conditions would be met. Likewise, most of the RIP districts (i.e. RIP-B, RIP-B-2, RIP-C and RIP-D) were created to address alcohol service in the Historic District. These districts, however, have become attractive to developers outside of the Historic District because they allow a high-residential density and low off-street parking requirements.

The RIP-D is unique among the various RIP districts. In 2010, the residential density for the RIP-D district was changed from 70 dwelling units per net acre to 100 dwelling units per gross acre; it is the only base district in the city where density is measured per gross acre.

This rezoning is proposed in conjunction with an associated general development plan. When there are “*unusual or extraordinary conditions*” associated with the rezoning request, this provision allows the Mayor and Aldermen to approve additional requirements to ensure that the development is compatible with the surrounding area. These requirements may include limiting land uses permitted within the district, requiring additional use conditions or other special design standards as indicated in Section 8-3031(D). The RIP-D district does not limit building height or building setbacks. Staff notes that the property housing the student housing complex to the south across the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal, known as Boundary Village, was rezoned to a RIP-B district with the same “*unusual or extraordinary condition*” clause.

EXISTING SITE AND BUILDING

The original parcel is improved with a one-story building - the historic Seaboard Freight Station – which was constructed in 1929. According to the Chatham County Board of Assessors, the one-story building is 342 feet long and contains approximately 71,000 sq. ft. The building is classified as industrial flex space but does not appear to be in active use. The building is not listed on any historic resource registers but is potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic

Places (NRHP) due to its historic significance. While the petitioners propose to demolish the entire structure, MPC staff recommends that the developers incorporate some aspect of the historic building (i.e. historic bricks, sign, etc.) into the design of the new building and allow for architectural salvage operations to save historic building materials. Additionally, MPC staff recommends that the petitioners comply with the MPC’s policy for documenting buildings prior to demolition (**EXHIBIT E**).

FACTS AND FINDINGS

1. **Public Notice:** Mailed notice of the January 8th MPC meeting was sent to all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property. Note that this case was originally to be presented at the January 8th MPC meeting, but was postponed to the January 29th meeting at the request of MPC staff. The property is within the Laurel Grove/Railroad Area neighborhood, which does not have a neighborhood association.
2. **Existing Development Pattern:** The property is located in an area that has played an important role in Savannah’s history and economy. The site is a block west of the boundaries of the local Savannah Historic District. Properties within the general vicinity previously supported the Central of Georgia (CoG) Railroad or were developed to support the railway. The Central of Georgia shops and terminal facilities at the southeast corner of Louisville Road and West Boundary Street house the Georgia State Railroad Museum. Directly north of the museum is the Savannah Visitor’s Center, housed in a former railroad station.

The property is also located adjacent to the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal. The canal supports drainage but is also at the heart of what has become known as the “Canal District.” The City is in the process of developing a vision for the area west of West Boundary Street, south of Louisville Road and north of Gwinnett Street, which is planned to be developed with an arena and a mix of supporting uses.

The land uses and zoning districts surrounding the subject property include:

Location	Land Use	Zoning
North	Louisville Rd./Former Railroad	P-B-C, Planned Community Business
East	Savannah-Ogeechee Canal/Georgia State Railroad Museum	B-C, Community Business
South	Boundary Village (SCAD student apartments)	P-RIP-B* (Medium-Density Residential with attached site plan)
West	U.S. Hwy. 17 off-ramp	I-H, Heavy Industrial

3. **Transportation Network:** The property abuts Louisville Road to the north and is adjacent to the U.S. 17 on/off-ramps. According to the Georgia Department of Transportation, Louisville Road is a two-lane secondary arterial street. The property abuts the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal

to the south. The only vehicular access to the site is from Louisville Road. Per the General Development Plan, two curb-cuts are proposed along Louisville Road.

Two CAT bus routes use Louisville Road – Routes 3 and 3B. There is an existing bus stop along Louisville Road at the far eastern edge of the property. A note on the General Development Plan states that a new bus shelter will be proposed as part of the project.

4. **Public Services and Facilities:** The property is served by the Savannah Police Department, Savannah fire protection, and by city water and sewer services.
5. **Future Land Use Map Classification:** The Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM), adopted in 2006, designates the subject property as Parks/Recreation. The Parks/Recreation classification is defined as, *“land dedicated to open space that is accessible to the public or land that is dedicated to sports, exercise, or other types of leisure activities.”*

A more appropriate FLUM classification would be Downtown Expansion, which is defined as, *“areas in close proximity to the Central Business District that are identified for growth of retail, office, entertainment, institutional, civic, and residential uses. This area is intended to be compatible and interconnected with the Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods, while also accommodating new forms of urban development.”*

6. **Existing P-RIP-D (Planned Medium-Density Residential) Zoning District.**

The original 1.64-acre parcel was rezoned from I-H to P-RIP-D in conjunction with a general development plan in October of 2016. The approved General Development Plan depicted a 140-unit student housing development, which was ultimately never constructed. Although the student housing development was never constructed, the General Development Plan is still tied to the site; therefore, any new development proposal requires the approval of a new General Development Plan through the “extraordinary and unusual conditions” provision of Section 8-3031(D)(1)(a).

Intent of the RIP-D District: The intent of the RIP-D district is to, *“stabilize land use intensity to not more than 100 dwelling units per gross acre of residential land. Such districts are intended to be located so as to provide transitional areas between residential uses and more intensive uses and/or districts.”*

Development Standards: The development standards for the RIP-D district appear at the end of this report in **Table 1**. There are no setback or height requirements within the RIP-D district, as this district was intended to be applied within the boundaries of the local Savannah Historic District.

Allowed Uses: The uses allowed within the RIP-D district appear in the attached **EXHIBIT B**. The RIP-D permits a variety of housing types, lodging uses, schools, offices and retail. It also requires special uses that could be appropriate, such as grocery stores, bakeries, assembly halls to obtain approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

7. Existing I-H (Heavy Industrial) Zoning District

The 0.91-acre surplus parcel is zoned I-H, which is the most intensive zoning district with regard to uses. The I-H district permits heavy manufacturing operations that may cause nuisances, such as fumes and noise.

Intent of the I-H District: The I-H district is intended to, “[...] create and protect areas in which industries which are not permitted in an I-L [Light Industrial] district can be permitted.”

Development Standards: The development standards for the I-H district appear in **Table 1**. Development standards are limited to yard setbacks; the district does not have height requirements.

Allowed Uses: The I-H district is predominantly an industrial district. Uses permitted within the I-H district appear in **EXHIBIT B**, attached.

8. Proposed P-RIP-D/ General Development Plan

As previously mentioned, the intent of the RIP-D district is to serve as a transitional area between residential uses and more intensive uses/districts with a maximum density of 100 dwelling units per gross acre. The petitioner has submitted a General Development Plan (**EXHIBIT C**) for the proposed development, named “Gateway Project.” The proposed development consists of a seven-story (90 ft.-tall) building featuring 255 units; at 2.55 gross acres, this amounts to a density of 100 dwelling units per acre. The distribution of bedroom types has not been provided. The site is located within a flood zone; the City of Savannah Flood Prevention Ordinance and Storm Water Ordinance will both apply. Additionally, USACE permits may be needed for impacts to wetlands in the southwestern corner of the site.

Setbacks: As proposed, the building is built to the front property line along Louisville Road and is set back from the edge of the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal by approximately 20 feet.

Building Coverage and Greenspace: The RIP-D district sets a maximum 75% building coverage. The building is proposed at 71% building coverage. Multi-family developments are subject to a minimum 20% greenspace requirement, per Section 8-12008(b). The amount of proposed greenspace is not depicted in the plan. Two interior courtyards are shown on the plans. The city’s Park and Tree Department has expressed concerns regarding the development’s capacity to satisfy greenspace and landscaping requirements, which will need to be met. Brownfield remediation may also be required prior to construction.

Parking: Per Section 8-3090, off-street parking for new dwellings within the RIP-D district is required at a rate of one space per dwelling unit. With 255 proposed units, 255 spaces are required. The GDP notes that 357 spaces will be provided in a garage on-site (first 2 floors of building). Nineteen on-street spaces are depicted on Louisville Road adjacent to the property; these proposed spaces will need vetted through traffic engineering.

Access and Transportation: Two curb-cuts are proposed along Louisville Road to provide

access to the site. An 8 ft.-wide concrete sidewalk is proposed adjacent to Louisville Road along the frontage of the site.

Two CAT bus routes use Louisville Road – Routes 3 and 3B. There is an existing bus stop along Louisville Road at the far eastern edge of the property. A note on the General Development Plan states that a new bus shelter will be proposed as part of the project.

Infrastructure: The development, as proposed, will tie into city water and sewer utilities. A note on the Plan states that stormwater runoff will discharge to the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal, and that green infrastructure/low-impact development practices will be used. However, details regarding these best practices have not been provided.

Building Elevations: Building elevations have not been provided. While the subject site is outside of the local historic district, staff recommends that building elevations and renderings be provided to the Planning Commission.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW CRITERIA:

The following criteria are to be considered for zoning map amendments as required by Zoning Ordinance Sec. 8-3183:

- a. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses that would create traffic volumes, noise levels, odor, airborne particulate matter, visual blight, reduced light or increase density of development that would adversely impact the livability or quality of life in the surrounding neighborhood.***

The original parcel retains the RIP-D designation but is tied to the previously-approved General Development Plan; the surplus parcel is zoned I-H. The non-residential uses permitted in the RIP-D district are less intense than most uses permitted in the I-H district. The RIP-D district allows more dwelling units than most all other city zoning districts and it requires only one off-street parking space per dwelling unit.

- b. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses that would adversely impact adjacent and nearby properties by rendering such properties less desirable and therefore less marketable for the type of development permitted under the current zoning.***

The uses permitted within the RIP-D district would not adversely impact nearby properties with regard to uses.

- c. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses that would generate a type or mix of vehicular traffic on a street or highway that is incompatible with the type of land use development along such street or highway.***

Multi-family residential uses are compatible with adjacent land uses and are an appropriate land use for this portion of Louisville Road.

- d. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses that would generate greater traffic volumes at vehicular access points and cross streets than is generated by uses permitted under the current zoning district to the detriment of maintaining acceptable or current volume capacity (V/C) ratio for the streets that provide vehicular access to the proposed zoning district and adjacent and nearby properties.***

It is not anticipated that the resulting traffic volume will create a substantial change. A traffic study has not been provided. Traffic Engineering will determine if a traffic study is required.

- e. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses or scales or development that would require a greater level of public services such as drainage facilities, utilities or safety services above that required for uses permitted under the current zoning district such that the provision of these services will create a financial burden to the public.***

A change in zoning would not be expected to create a financial burden to the public. This is an urban property and infrastructure is in place already. Any changes, such as drainage improvements, would be the responsibility of the developer.

- f. ***Will the proposed zoning district permit uses or scale of development that would adversely impact the improvement or development of adjacent and nearby properties in accordance with existing zoning regulations and development controls deemed necessary to maintain the stability and livability of the surrounding neighborhood.***

The additional property (surplus parcel) will bring the total acreage of the project site to 2.55 gross acres. The RIP-D district permits a maximum of 100 dwelling units per gross acre. 255 dwelling units would be permitted on-site; 255 units are proposed. The RIP-D district is a more appropriate zoning designation for the surplus parcel than the existing I-H district.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The 1.64-acre “original parcel” is currently zoned P-RIP-D, while the 0.91-acre “surplus parcel” is zoned I-H. While the original parcel already retains the requested base zoning district, the parcel is tied to a previously-approved general development plan for a 140-unit student housing project. Therefore, under the provisions of Section 8-3031(D)(1)(a) of the Zoning Ordinance, the Mayor and Aldermen are required to act on this new General Development Plan.

The existing I-H zoning district is not an appropriate zoning district for the surplus parcel; its proximity to downtown, the Historic District and location within the Canal District suggests that it should be part of the Downtown Expansion area on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map. According to the comprehensive plan, this classification should provide for “...a vibrant mix of retail, office, entertainment, institutional, civic and residential uses with a high degree of connectivity to the central business district.” The RIP-D permits uses that could support this mix.

Nonetheless, the 255 proposed units is the maximum density permitted for the site under the RIP-

D zoning district. MPC and Savannah Development Services staff have several concerns regarding the extent of the development, including unit mix, greenspace, landscaping, stormwater runoff, and building appearance. Additionally, MPC staff recommends that the developers incorporate some aspect of the historic building (i.e. historic bricks, sign, etc.) into the design of the new building, allow for the salvaging of historic building materials, and comply with the MPC's policy for documenting buildings prior to demolition. Several of these concerns can be addressed in greater detail during the Specific Development Plan review process.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Recommend approval of the P-RIP-D zoning classification applying the “extraordinary and unusual” provision of Sec. 8-3031(D)(1)(a) and approval of the proposed General Development Plan.
2. Recommend approval of an alternative classification.
3. Recommend denial of the petitioner's request.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVAL of the requested rezoning classification from I-H (Heavy Industrial) zoning classification to a P-RIP-D (Planned Medium Density Residential) zoning classification applying the “extraordinary and unusual” provision of Sec. 8-3031(D)(1)(a) (file no. 18-006863-ZA) and **APPROVAL** of the proposed General Development Plan (file no. 18-006368-PLAN), subject to the following conditions:

1. Provide anticipated unit mix (number of bedrooms);
2. Meet 20% greenspace requirement;
3. Clarify type of green infrastructure/low-impact stormwater management techniques to be utilized;
4. Present concept building elevations and renderings to the Planning Commission;
5. Incorporate some aspect of the historic building (i.e. historic bricks, sign, etc.) into the design of the new building and allow for historic building materials to be salvaged; and
6. Comply with the MPC's policy for documenting buildings prior to demolition.

NOTE: Separate motions shall be made for the rezoning application (18-006863-ZA) and the General Development Plan (18-006368-PLAN).

Table 1: Comparison of Development Standards for the Existing I-H and Proposed RIP-D Zoning Districts		
	Existing District	Existing and Proposed District
	I-H District	RIP-D District
Minimum Lot Area (each unit unless otherwise specified)	n/a	Residential: 435 sf Non-residential: n/a
Minimum Lot Width	n/a	Residential: Detached / Semi-detached or End-row: 20 ft Attached or Row: n/a Nonresidential: n/a
Front Yard Setback	From the centerline of the following roadways: Freeway: 115 ft Major Arterial: 65 ft Secondary Arterial: 55 ft Collector: 45 ft Residential: 45 ft Access Easement: 36 ft	n/a [2]
Minimum Side Yard Setback	20 ft [1]	n/a [2]
Minimum Rear Yard Setback	20 ft [1]	n/a [2]
Maximum Height	n/a	n/a [2]
Maximum Building Coverage	n/a	75%
Maximum Density	n/a (Note: Residential uses are not permitted)	100 units per <i>gross</i> acre

[1] When the adjacent property is in an “R” district, the side and rear yards have to “be equal to the height of the building or as shown, whichever is more restrictive.” A side yard abutting a street may be reduced to 15 feet. *Sec. 8-3025(d)*.

[2] Because the RIP-D district was intended for the Historic District, setbacks and height are provided in *Sec. 8-3030* (Historic District). A height map identifies the maximum number of stories permitted throughout the District. Front yard setbacks are based on whether a lot is a trust or titling lot. Side yards and rear yards are not required; however, the maximum building coverage will typically cause the rear yard to become the backyard or greenspace.